

## 5.2 Agricultural Resources

This analysis focuses on impacts to agricultural resources associated with the adoption and implementation of the proposed General Plan, adoption and implementation of the revised Zoning Code and Subdivision Code, and adoption and implementation of the Magnolia Avenue Specific Plan, as these actions have the potential to affect agricultural resources, including Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Farmland of Local Importance and Williamson Act contract land. The Citywide Design Guidelines and Sign Guidelines only address site planning, building design and community aesthetics, and are thus not considered relevant to this analysis.

For purposes of this section and ease of understanding, the term “agricultural resources” encompasses areas of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance and Farmland of Local Importance as defined by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) database and the City of Riverside.

### Environmental Setting

Agriculture is an important part of the City of Riverside’s history. The citrus industry was the mainstay of the City of Riverside’s economy starting in the late nineteenth century and continuing well into the twentieth. The climate and soils were favorable to widespread commercial citrus crops. During the late twentieth century, however, there was significant pressure to convert agricultural land to suburban use. Numerous citriculture areas were completely converted to urban and suburban uses after the 1970s.

### Proposition R and Measure C

In 1979, City of Riverside voters passed Proposition R: “Taxpayer’s Initiative to Reduce Costly Urban Sprawl by Preserving the City of Riverside’s Citrus and Agricultural lands, Its Unique Hills, Arroyos and Victoria Avenue.” The two main features of Proposition R relate to: 1) preservation of agriculture through application of the RA-5-Residential Agricultural Zone to two specific areas of the City: and 2) protection of hillside areas through application of the RC-Residential Conservation Zone to areas of the City based on slopes over 15 percent. The two areas of the City which were zoned to RA-5 are: 1) the Arlington Heights Greenbelt, consisting of 5,600 acres in the south and central portion of the City; and 2) an area of 640 acres commonly known as the La Sierra Lands, a bluff top area above the Santa Ana River bordered by Tyler Street on the east and Arlington Avenue on the west. The Arlington Heights Greenbelt and the La Sierra Lands are shown in **Figure 5-1**.

**Figure 5-1**  
**Farmland in the City of Riverside and Sphere of Influence**

Eight years later, City of Riverside voters approved Measure C as an amendment to Proposition R, entitled “Citizens’ Rights Initiative to Reduce Costly Urban Sprawl, to Reduce Traffic Congestion, to Minimize Utility Rate Increases and to Facilitate Preservation of the City of Riverside’s Citrus and Agricultural Lands, its Scenic Hills, Ridgelines, Arroyos and Wildlife Areas”. Measure C amended Proposition R by adding policies to promote agriculture. Measure C also required that a specific plan be prepared in advance of any development of the La Sierra Lands.

### State and Federal Programs

The preservation of agricultural resources and activities has been an explicit goal of the California Department of Conservation (CDC) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). As growth and urbanization continue, agricultural areas are converted, resulting in an overall loss in arable land to support agricultural activities, as well as valuable topsoil.

Congress enacted the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) to “...minimize the extent to which federal programs contribute to the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses...” (7 U.S.C. 4201(b), et seq.). The NRCS rates the agricultural suitability of soils in terms of both the Land Use Compatibility Classification System and the Storie Index. The Classification System shows the suitability of soils for most types of field crops according to their limitations, risk of damage when used and the way they respond to treatment. The Storie Index expresses the suitability of soils for general intensive farming, based on characteristics of the soil. Based on the Storie Index, soils can be classified from Grade 1, considered excellent and very well suited to general intensive farming, to Grade 6, soils and miscellaneous areas not suited to farming. The FPPA requires federal agencies to examine the impacts of their programs before they approve any activity that would convert farmland. However, the FPPA has no requirement for Federal agencies to alter projects to avoid or minimize farmland conversion.

In 1982, the CDC enacted the FMMP in response to a critical need for assessing the location, quality, and quantity of agricultural lands and conversion of these lands over time. FMMP is a non-regulatory program and provides a consistent and impartial analysis of agricultural land use and land use changes throughout California. Through the FMMP, agricultural resources are separated into the following categories:

- **Prime Farmland:** Lands with the best combination of physical and chemical features and able to sustain long term production of agricultural crops. This land must have been used to produce irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date.
- **Farmland of Statewide Importance:** Lands similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. This land must have been used to produce irrigated crops at some time during the two update cycles prior to the mapping date.
- **Unique Farmland:** Lands with lesser quality soils used to produce leading agricultural crops. Includes nonirrigated orchards or vineyards.

- **Farmland of Local Importance:** Lands of importance to the local agricultural economy, as determined by each county's board of supervisors and a local advisory committee.
- **Grazing Land:** Lands on which existing vegetation is suited to livestock grazing. This category was developed in cooperation with the California Cattlemen's Association and U.C. Cooperative Extension.

Per 2002 FMMP data, the Planning Area has 3,392 acres of Prime Farmland, 2,672 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance, 4,665 acres of Unique Farmland, 5,773 acres of Farmland of Local Importance and 7,272 acres of Grazing Land. **Figure 5-1** shows farmland in the Planning Area.

Most of the agricultural resources within the City of Riverside are southeast of Victoria Avenue on the south side of SR-91 in the 5,600-acre Arlington Heights Greenbelt area traditionally planted with orange groves. Other areas of agricultural resources are scattered throughout the City, with concentrations located near the University of California at Riverside (UCR). Agricultural resources are also located throughout the Planning Area with concentrated clusters in the north and east sections of the Sphere of Influence. Limited areas of grazing land are located within the City west of Fillmore Street on the west edge of the City boundary.

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, also known as the Williamson Act (Government Code Section 51200 et seq.), defines prime agricultural soils as any one of the following soils which have capability groupings of Class I or II: soils which have Storie Index ratings of 80 to 100; land supporting livestock equivalent to a minimum of one animal unit per 0.405 ha (one acre); or land planted with fruit or nut bearing vegetation producing not less than \$81 per ha (\$200 per acre) annually (Government Code Section 51201[C]). The Williamson Act was adopted as an incentives program, encouraging the preservation of the state's agricultural lands. As a means to implement the Act, a land contract is established, whereby a county board of supervisors or city council stabilizes the taxes on qualifying lands in return for an owner's guarantee to keep the land in agricultural preserve status for a 10-year period. Each year, on its anniversary date, the contract is automatically renewed unless a notice of non-renewal is filed.

There are two Williamson Act contract areas that the City lists within City limits: one parcel within Hunter Business Park along the City border near the northeast part of the City at the intersection of Columbia Avenue and Michigan Avenue, and four parcels south of SR-91 and near the western boundary of the City close to the intersection of Overlook Parkway and Washington Street. Riverside County indicates that there are several Williamson Act parcels within the City's Planning Area and several within the City's boundary (County of Riverside TLMA Geographic Information System, 2004). These include preserves in the following areas:

- The area adjacent to Cajalco Road south of Lake Matthews
- The area along El Sobrante Road west of Mockingbird Canyon Road and east of La Sierra Avenue
- the area in the northeast part of the SOI, the area within the City boundary east of the intersection of Trautwein Road and Wood Road

- The area along Krameria Avenue between Barton Street and Washington Street
- The area north of Markham Street between Washington Street and Wood Road
- The area southeast of the intersection of Markham Street and Wood Road.

Williamson Act contract areas and preserves are shown on **Figure 5-2**.

## Thresholds for Determining Level of Impact

For the purposes of this EIR, a significant impact will occur if Project implementation will:

- Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland) to non-agricultural use; or
- Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract; or
- Involve other changes in the existing environment which could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use.

## Environmental Impact

Development pursuant to Project policies and regulatory standards will result in the addition of up to 38,100 new dwelling units and 39,600,000 square feet of new non-residential construction over the 20-year horizon of the General Plan within the Planning Area. Although the Project will not directly convert Farmland to non-agricultural use, it is possible that development of dwelling units and non-residential areas may impact agricultural areas. Both the General Plan and the Zoning Code retain Agricultural land use designations; no land previously designated for agriculture has been redesignated for another use.

To prevent indirect impacts on agricultural resources, the Project includes policies and tools that will retain, protect and encourage agricultural land use. The following policies enable the preservation and protection of agricultural land through assistance programs, development of agricultural zoning districts, transfer of development rights and leases to UCR, and development of suitable buffers around agricultural uses to prevent incompatible land uses adjacent to agricultural uses and water subsidies.

Policy OS-3.1: Promote and encourage agriculture as an essential industry and a desirable open space use. The Greenbelt and La Sierra Lands (i.e. Rancho La Sierra) are important agricultural lands because of their high soil quality, favorable climate and low water costs. Retain wherever feasible, agricultural lands in private ownership and encourage and assist the maintenance and formation of family farms, especially for farmers who live on their land.

**Figure 5-2**  
**Williamson Act Parcels in the City of Riverside and Sphere of Influence**

- Policy OS-3.2: Identify land for retention and encouragement of agricultural use based on consideration of historic use, soil suitability, agricultural significance, prevailing parcel sizes and geographical associations.
- Policy OS-3.3: Protect valuable agricultural land from urban development through the use of agricultural zoning districts and other appropriate development regulations, as well as financial and tax incentives.
- Policy OS-3.4: Encourage property owners to preserve citrus groves and implement public programs to provide incentives and other assistance to promote and protect citrus farming on prime agricultural lands.
- Policy OS-3.5: Consider strategies to enhance the productivity of the local agricultural industry, such as the creation of special electric and water rate structures and the establishment of an interest subsidy program for loans used for fencing, screening and replanting of agricultural lands.
- Policy OS-3.6: Support alternative allowable uses, such as crop diversification, within historic citriculture areas where such uses will retain the agricultural use and character of the areas.
- Policy OS-3.7: Evaluate various proactive programs for agricultural preservation such as transfer of development rights, purchase lease back, University purchase for research and purchase of development rights.
- Policy OS-3.8: Recognize Agricultural Conservation Areas adopted by Riverside County pursuant to the Williamson Act in planning for future development and possible annexation of areas within the City's sphere of influence.
- Policy OS-3.9: Coordinate programs to preserve agricultural lands with other public, private and non-profit organizations.
- Policy OS-3.10: Continue to work with the state to promote and expand the California Citrus State Historic Park.
- Policy OS-3.11: Explore the creation of an incentive program for the conservation of agricultural lands.
- Policy OS-4.1: Continue to enforce Proposition R and Measure C.
- Policy OS-4.2: Establish buffers and/or open space between agricultural and urban uses so that impacts from urban development can be mitigated.
- Policy OS-4.3: Explore the possibility of establishing a fee for all new development in Riverside for land banking to create new buffers and/or purchase sensitive lands between urban development and existing open space resources.

With adherence to and implementation of the above General Plan policies, Project impacts to agricultural resources will be less than significant at the programmatic level.

## **Mitigation Measures**

No mitigation is required, as impact will be less than significant at the programmatic level.

## **Level of Impact after Mitigation**

With adherence to and implementation of the above General Plan policies, the Project's potential agricultural resources impacts will be reduced below a level of significance at the programmatic level.

The significance of agricultural resources impacts resulting from specific future development projects will be evaluated on a project-by-project basis. If project-level impacts are identified, specific mitigation measures will be required per CEQA.

## **References**

County of Riverside Transportation and Land Management Agency (TLMA) Geographic Information Systems. Agricultural Preserves Shapefile. 2004.

Farmland Mitigation and Monitoring Program (FMMP). Riverside County. 2002.